

Digital as a new discourse

O digital como um novo discurso


El digital como un nuevo discurso

Le numérique comme un nouveau discours

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Abstract

The present work arises from the hypothesis that, based on the cultural changes introduced by the processes of digitalization of information, it became possible to observe, in contemporary society, a mutation in the status of knowledge, which had effects on subjectivity itself. Starting from the mathematical discourse of the capitalist proposed by Jacques Lacan, we highlight the elements that characterize the new discursive pattern underway in digital culture due to its dynamics animated by the logic of numbers, to be named as digital discourse. We will seek to point out to what extent the change in the status of knowledge allows us to infer this new discursive dynamic. Thus, an outline will be made of what digital culture is, indicated as an effect of the new format assumed by capitalism. Next, the perspectives assumed by the notion of knowledge within the scope of capitalist discourse will be outlined. Finally, the mutations suffered by contemporary society will be considered with the entrance into the scene of digitized information and, more specifically, the digital algorithm to propose the emergence of digital discourse as the most recent version of capitalist discourse. Based on such premises, it is worth asking whether we are still facing the capitalist discourse or, in fact, a new discourse in which the elements of the social bond receive an unprecedented rearrangement, that is, a sixth discourse, namely, *digital discourse*.

Keywords: knowledge, discourse, digital culture, capitalist discourse, digital algorithm

Resumo

O presente trabalho decorre da hipótese de que a partir das mudanças culturais introduzidas pelos processos de digitalização da informação, tornou-se possível observarmos, na sociedade contemporânea, uma mutação no estatuto do saber, o que teve efeitos para a própria subjetividade. Partindo do matema do discurso do capitalista proposto por Jacques Lacan, assinalamos os elementos que caracterizam o novo padrão discursivo em curso na cultura digital em função de sua dinâmica animada pela lógica dos números, a ser nomeado como discurso digital. Buscaremos apontar em que medida é a mudança de estatuto do saber que nos permite inferir essa nova dinâmica discursiva. Assim, será feito um delineamento do que seja a cultura digital, indicada como efeito do novo formato assumido

pelo capitalismo. Na sequência, serão traçadas as perspectivas assumidas pela noção de saber no âmbito do discurso capitalista. Finalmente, serão consideradas as mutações sofridas pela sociedade contemporânea com a entrada em cena da informação digitalizada e, mais especificamente do algoritmo digital, de modo a propor a emergência do discurso digital como sendo a mais recente versão do discurso capitalista. A partir de tais premissas, cabe indagar se estaríamos ainda diante do discurso do capitalista ou, de fato, de um novo discurso em que os elementos do laço social recebessem rearranjo inédito, isto é, um sexto discurso, nomeadamente, discurso digital.

Palavras-chave: saber, discurso, cultura digital, discurso capitalista, algoritmo digital

Resumen

El presente trabajo trata de la hipótesis de que, a partir de los cambios culturales introducidos por los procesos de digitalización de la información, se hizo posible observar, en la sociedad contemporánea, una mutación en el estatuto del saber, lo que tuvo efecto para la propia subjetividad. Partiendo del matema del discurso del capitalista propuesto por Jacques Lacan, marcamos los elementos que caracterizan el nuevo estándar discursivo en curso en la cultura digital en función de su animada dinámica por la lógica de los números, a ser nombrado como discurso digital. Buscaremos indicar en qué medida es el cambio de estatuto del saber que nos permite inferir esta nueva dinámica discursiva. Así, será hecho un delineamiento de lo que sea la cultura digital, indicada como efecto del nuevo formato asumido por el capitalismo. En la secuencia, serán trazadas las perspectivas asumidas por la noción de saber en el ámbito del discurso capitalista. Finalmente, serán consideradas las mutaciones sufridas por la sociedad contemporánea con la entrada en escena de la información digitalizada y, más específicamente del algoritmo digital, de modo a proponer la emergencia del discurso capitalista. A partir de tales premisas, cabe preguntar si estaríamos todavía ante el discurso del capitalismo o, de hecho, de un nuevo discurso en que los elementos del lazo social recibieran arreglo inédito, es decir, un sexto discurso, nombradamente, discurso digital.

Palabras clave: conocimiento, discurso, cultura digital, discurso capitalista, algoritmo digital

Résumé

Ce travail découle de l'hypothèse qui a permis d'observer, dans la société contemporaine, une mutation du statut de la connaissance, à partir des changements culturels introduits par les processus de numérisation de l'information, ayant des effets sur la subjectivité elle-même. En partant du mathème du discours capitaliste proposé par Jacques Lacan, nous mettons en évidence les éléments caractéristiques du nouveau modèle discursif en vigueur dans la culture numérique, en raison de sa dynamique déclenchée par la logique des nombres, à nommer comme discours numérique. Nous chercherons à indiquer dans quelle mesure le changement de statut de la connaissance nous permet d'inférer cette nouvelle dynamique discursive. Ainsi, nous délimiterons la culture numérique, la définissant comme un effet du nouveau format adopté par le capitalisme. Ensuite, les perspectives assumées par la notion de savoir dans le contexte du discours capitaliste seront retracées. Enfin, nous considérerons les changements subis par la société contemporaine avec l'entrée en scène de l'information numérisée et, plus précisément, de l'algorithme numérique, afin de proposer l'émergence du discours numérique comme la dernière version du discours capitaliste. À partir de ces prémisses, il convient de se demander si nous sommes encore face au discours du capitaliste ou, en réalité, à un nouveau discours dans lequel les éléments du lien social subiraient un réarrangement sans précédent, à savoir un sixième discours, nommé discours numérique.

Mots-clés: connaissance, discours, culture numérique, discours capitaliste, algorithme numérique

This paper is based on the hypothesis that, because of the cultural changes introduced by the digitalization of information, it has become possible to observe, in contemporary society, a mutation in the status of knowledge, which influences subjectivity itself. Thus, despite being increasingly frequent, discussions about possible transitions in the forms of presentation of current subjectivity may not yet consider, with due breadth, the effects of what we can now understand as a new cultural pattern resulting from the prominence of numbers in our society, that is, the numerical or digital culture. For psychoanalysis, it is also necessary to consider the relationship we establish with knowledge, the nodal point of our link with everything that surrounds us, a component of our very connection with otherness.

The rapid development of what we understand here by the term “digital culture” justifies both its increasing use and the lack of definition or consensus on the matter. In any case, the undeniable changes point to the need to seek to understand the effects on the contemporary subject of what, since the second half of the 20th century, has been called the “information age” or “knowledge age”. Thus, if cyberculture was already being spoken of in the 1980s, it was like a specific area of the culture, influenced by the language of information technology, due to the entry of *personal computers* in Western homes. Nowadays, this language has come to occupy the entire extent of the social bond; when the city, the urban space and

the relationships that animate the *polis* have been definitively flooded by digitalization, to such an extent that the analog remnants, which may still exist in society, seem to have become nuisances, when not invested in a fetishistic way, as occurs in a certain culture of *vintage analog devices*.

In fact, digital culture has imposed a new rhythm on social life. The acceleration of operational processes in different sectors of society, combined with an atmosphere of personalized services, an idea sold as something strictly positive, and the emergence of new forms of entertainment, soon made us lose our modesty regarding the conventional boundaries of the world of work or academic life. The arrival of *smartphones* stimulated and intensified the flow of information which, becoming increasingly unavoidable, overrode, for example, the time limits for conversations between bosses and employees, teachers and students and groups, previously restricted to the eight hours established for work. In addition, it increased, in the same sense, the exchanges at a distance between friends, co-workers and family, as well as those of an emotional and sexual nature. Time and distance became less and less of an impediment to communication with speech and images in real time and in a comprehensive manner.

For psychoanalysis, it is a matter of considering the scope of such changes in subjectivity. It is undeniable that the dizzying acceleration of digital technologies and their incidence in all sectors of human life interferes with the ways of thinking, communicating and creating bonds, contributing as well to the emergence of new symptoms. The rapid expansion of digital technologies throughout the world is due, especially to their capacity to evoke enjoyment and their intimate relationship with the body. In addition, digital technological development interferes with the ways of appropriating and transmitting knowledge. Jacques Lacan, in his theory of discourses, presents knowledge as one of the discursive elements that make up the social bond. In his notations, such elements are the master signifier $[S_1]$, knowledge $[S_2]$, the object $[a]$ and the subject $[\$]$, orbiting in the Mathema, a figure that Lacan used as a topological structure, supporting the four radical matrices of the social bond, a concept that equates to the idea of discourse. This is how the discourses of the teacher, the hysteric, the analyst and the university student are proposed, formed by the repositioning of such elements, in constant rotation around the Mathema.

Two years later, however, we see the emergence of a fifth and final discourse, that of the capitalist, which breaks with the logic of the initial matrices. Coming from Lacan's readings of the social and political transformations taking place at that time, it results from a modification in the dynamics of Mathema and, like the previous ones, reflects an effort to allow psychoanalysis to operate its own conceptual keys in the social bond.

Thus, based on the approach made possible by this fifth Mathema proposed by Lacan 50 years ago, in this paper we will seek to highlight the elements that allow us to characterize and defend that a new discursive pattern is in action in digital culture. Based on these initial premises, it is worth asking: are we still dealing with the discourse of the capitalist or a sixth discourse, due to an unprecedented rearrangement of the elements of the social bond? In this proposal, which we present here, we will see how the changes in the bond, caused by the logic animated essentially by numbers, deserve a name that considers the present context, therefore, a *digital discourse*. In this proposal, we seek to point out to what extent it is especially a conversion operated in the status of knowledge that allows us to infer this new discursive dynamic. To this end, we begin by outlining what digital culture is, to be designated as an effect of the new format assumed by capitalism due to the great influx of information encoded in numbers. Next, we indicate the perspectives assumed by the notion of knowledge in capitalist discourse, proposed by Lacan based on his theory of social bond. Finally, we seek to indicate the possible mutations observed in the social bond, essentially permeated by technological devices, because of the entry into the scene of the digital algorithm, in order to propose the emergence of digital discourse as an unfolding of capitalist discourse, resulting from this new cultural pattern.

Digital culture: new language of capitalism

The expression "digital culture" refers to the cultural exchanges that have taken shape in today's society due to the digitalization process in which information, previously physical or analog, began to be transcribed into the language of discrete data, that is, countable, through combinations of the digits 0 (zero) and 1 (one). The gradual development of this numerical language has as a corollary the advent of a vast technological apparatus that supports it.

The emergence of digital culture is linked to historical factors that motivated this technological development in the fields of communication and information from the post-war period onwards. During this period, referred to by some authors as "post-industrial capitalism" or, by others, as the "information era" or "information society", a process began to stimulate massive investment in academic research aimed at the development of such technologies by governments and companies. This process began with the invention of the computer during the Second World War (Kumar, 2006). From then on, the development of informational language gained increasing momentum. Techno-scientific knowledge and, above all, information, were raised to a new level, beginning to receive attention on a global scale and being affected by a growing urgency for changes in the way it was treated and its format.

However, the advent and expansion of the Internet were the crucial points that allowed capitalism to spread its discourse across practically all fields, becoming hegemonic as a system and as an ideology. This advent occurred in the 1970s in the restricted scope of intelligence operations of the Western armed forces. Its definitive expansion only occurred with the creation of the *World Wide Web* in the 1990s, a period in which information and communication technologies (ICT) gained momentum. With the popularization of *Web 2.0* in 2004 and the spread of *smartphones* in those early years of the millennium, together with the phenomena of the recently created social networks, we have the technological milestones of the acceleration of the process of digitalization of private life and socialization in general. As a result, previously separate sectors of human life, such as work, family and social relationships, begin to mix in this digital melting pot where all types of information can be found, especially in advertisements for services and commerce. The role of portable devices in multiplying the supply of new virtual products, previously unthinkable, is undeniable. Thus, digitalized information becomes the “fluid” that transmits content – both new and old – in a process that is becoming increasingly self-regulated. In imaginary terms, a discourse that boasts values such as lightness and agility, based on the idea of uninterrupted innovation, gains voice. At the present time, the observation that emerged a few years ago that “knowledge is in your pocket” (Miller, 2015) already seems obvious, as if it had always been that way.

For Charlie Gere (2008), the seemingly simple term “digital” defines a complex set of phenomena whose increasingly extensive presence in our lives is indicative of the existence of a culture. The author considers digitalization as a marker of culture because it encompasses artifacts and systems of meaning and communication that clearly distinguish contemporary lifestyles from previous ones. For him, the term “digital” has come to mean so much more than discrete data or any machinery used for its transmission: “To speak of digital is to refer, metonymically, to the entire panoply of virtual simulacrum, instant communication, ubiquitous media, and global connectivity that constitutes a large part of our contemporary experience” (Gere, 2008, p. 15). Thus, the term has become synonymous with technology itself, ceasing to belong to the reduced field of binary data to extend to the whole of contemporary life. It is in this sense that we seek to use it here, recognizing the high degree of its interference, beyond terms such as “cyberculture” or expressions such as “information era or society” or “knowledge era”.

André Lemos (2009) warns about the tendency to name culture based on technological artifacts, which would respond to a determinism of such apparatus over it. For our part, however, the use of “digital culture” is justified for two main reasons: firstly, because it is an expression that encompasses even segments of society not yet directly inserted into the language of computers and other *gadgets*. Thus, if speaking of cyberculture referred to a very specific experience of a segment that presented itself almost as a subculture of initiated followers, *nerds*, and *aficionados*; speaking of digital culture fits more easily into the process triggered in the last 20 years with the popularization of technologies and the conversion of contemporary life to the language of numerical data. There is no longer any choice about whether or not to be affected by digitalization. Even without their knowledge, groups that live on the margins of society also depend on the digital system, which has become an inescapable injunction, which ranges from the use of *Uber*, credit cards, or a simple phone call. The verb “connect” and its derived terms are now common and widely used in practically any context.

Still regarding the term “cyberculture”, it is in reference to “*cyberpunk culture*”, inspired by the fictional literature of writers such as William Gibson (*Neuromancer*, 1984) – who coined the term *cyberspace* – or Isaac Asimov (*I, Robot*, 1979), in addition to futurologist productions in cinema, where we find its origins. Such influences are the basis of research by renowned authors in this discussion (Lemos, 2008; Lévy, 1999), some of whom are tributaries of a certain utopia closer to the initial stages of the computerization process. Pierre Lévy, for example, believes in the expansion of a global collaborative intelligence, proposing the emergence of “intelligent collectives in which the social and cognitive potentialities of each individual can develop and expand reciprocally” (Lévy, 2015, p. 23). From this perspective, the potential of the virtualization of knowledge would finally fulfill the emancipatory project of Modernity, the object of so many quarrels between Frankfurt theorists, such as Habermas, and American or French postmodernists, such as Jean-François Lyotard. This last philosopher, in fact, raised the issue of the change in the status of knowledge due to the centrality that information began to occupy in the contemporary world as a central hypothesis of his famous “*The Postmodern Condition*” (Lyotard, 2008).

As a result of this process, the way of life itself changes, because, if initially the use of computers was limited to the cognitive and organizational dimension, with the invention of the Internet, technology is linked to subjective domains only considered in fiction literature and cinema. In fact, without access to the Internet, a computer, *smartphone* or *tablet* they become practically useless devices and can generate frustration due to the almost total dependence of contemporary society on the world wide web. In fact, this is a condition for the insertion of the individual not only in the world of work, largely highlighted by the undeniable dynamism of its renewal, but also in social life in general, all of which is increasingly permeated by the virtual filters that technologies place between the fields of the subject and the Other, that is, in the foundations of the social bond, according to Lacan (1992).

Mutations of knowledge and capitalist discourse

What we can see at the present time, however, is that if such a modern project is in fact underway, it cannot be without the constant interference of big capital, which presents itself as obstacles to this truly emancipatory potential. In fact, we can understand that the almost total appropriation of digital language by capitalism makes it its main ideological vehicle and the driving force behind its expansion today. As Evgeny Morozov (2019) warns us, data and information are today the “new oil” and digital technology is not just applied science, but rather “a confusing tangle of geopolitics, global finance, unbridled consumerism and accelerated corporate appropriation of our most intimate relationships” (Morozov, 2019, p. 7). For the author, what is at stake in this new form of culture is the American way of life that is spreading as a global model. Gere (2008) highlights that this process of distribution and commercialization of culture gained a new perspective with the convergence of the known forms of modern media to the digital format, determining the closer relationship of what came to be known as the “technosciences”¹ with the media and free market capitalism. “The simultaneous development of science, media and capital under the aegis of digital technology produces a rapid-fire effect in which everything seems to occur at an accelerated rate, to produce drastic changes in a very short time” (Gere, 2008, p. 14).

Lacan (1992) had already announced the strengthening of the relationship between capitalism and science, and it is in the sphere of university discourse that he will situate this approximation. It is with knowledge [S₂] in the position of the agent of that matheme that knowledge is appropriated by the discourse of science. Even more unusual is the way in which Lacan refers, incisively, to the connection between capitalism and science: “We did not wait, to see this, for the discourse of the master to have fully developed to show its key in the discourse of the capitalist, in its curious copulation with science” (Lacan, 1992, p. 103).

Thus, the hegemony of capitalism has its driving force in this marriage with modern science, which was then in rapid growth, and its foundations are attached to university discourse. The latter not only dispenses with a truth based on a master but establishes knowledge in the dominant place. For Lima (2006), however, this knowledge that is an agent in university discourse and operates as knowledge with the aim of filling the gap, ends up emptying the interest in knowledge, which loses its potential. In this way, this “knowledge that is not known” loses its capacity to subvert the theory of knowledge itself (Lacan, 2003), because, with S₂ as an agent, knowledge, if it claims to be fixed, distances itself from the incomplete character of knowledge, although it is nothing more than a semblance of it, in the same way that the different versions of a myth, when fixed, are still versions. It is from the connection of this pair with capitalism that the subjective division comes to be used to make the subject the consumer of the goods it produces. Hence Lacan (1992) can ask the question: “Who in our time can dream even for an instant of stopping the movement of articulation of the discourse of science in the name of whatever may happen?” (Lacan, 1992, p. 97).

Quite early in relation to the first four matrices, the proposition of capitalist discourse presents an adaptation of the theory of discourses. This is what allows it to be taken as a basis for a reading of contemporaneity. Just two years after the proposition of the four discourses, Lacan (1978) finally formulates a fifth, without any major ambiguities in relation to university discourse. On that occasion, when speaking about the analyst’s discourse to an audience of professors and students from the University of Milan, Lacan writes the formulation of *capitalist discourse*, proceeding to its peculiar explanation (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Capitalist discourse

$$\downarrow \frac{S}{S_1} \times \frac{S_2}{a} \downarrow$$

Unlike the previous ones, this discourse results from a twist between the two terms of the subject’s field in the master’s discourse, when S₁ and S change positions. Although this change occurs, the sequence of signifiers does not change, since the vector of this field also inverts from top to bottom, following the twist. This means that the original sequence of signifiers is maintained. Even so, this new mathematical conformation brings a series of consequences for discursive logic, which can be seen in topological, dynamic and also economic terms. It is in reference to such terms created by Freud to address the division of his metapsychology that we use them here, purposefully, as a reinterpretation. Taking into account all the differences regarding Freud’s proposition and the theoretical review undertaken by Lacan, we understand that one of the

¹ The term designates the social context and technological science in its current stage, indicating that scientific knowledge is not only socially encoded and positioned, but increasingly supported and made durable by networks non-human materials (Technoscience, 2020).

most relevant aspects presented by the matheme of discourses, which consists of an approximation of knowledge with enjoyment, allows us to glimpse a shadow of the three dimensions mentioned. We are certainly aware of the difference that, in this case, the terms represent in relation to that proposed by Freud, and it is not our intention to make a direct interposition of his conception here. However, in the Mathema, it is a topology, and this, through its movement, implies a dynamic that changes the logic between the discourses. By considering in an unprecedented way the implication of enjoyment for the social bond, we understand that we can also glimpse here a reinterpretation of the economic dimension.

Thus, in relation to its topology, although it maintains the same positions, the capitalist's Mathema presents an unexpected mosaic of other discourses, in terms of the locations of the signifiers. In the field of the subject, from a topological point of view, as occurs in the hysteric's discourse, the capitalist brings the divided subject [S] – always dissatisfied and in search of knowledge about himself – in the place of the agent. The master [S₁] reappears in the place of truth, as in the university discourse. Being evident as an agent in the master's discourse and showing itself to be veiled in the field of truth in the university, the master-signifier presents itself in a particular way in the capitalist, as we will see later. In the field of the Other, the same configuration of the master's discourse is repeated, with S₂ in the place of the other and the object *a* as the remainder of the operation. Here we find the logic inserted by the fifth paradigm of enjoyment (Miller, 2012), which takes *knowledge as a means of enjoyment* and which, in this particular discourse, has other consequences. In this way, we have a configuration in which the positioning of the signifiers goes back to the other matrices, apart from the analyst, with which, curiously, the capitalist does not maintain any correlation.

Due to this oscillation of S₁ in the field of the subject, we recognize here a lineage of masters, whose mark is to always bring S₁ – the “key” of the master (Lacan, 1992) – in the field of the subject. In this case, the capitalist discourse can be taken as a *hypermodern master*², following the other two: the master of traditions [master's discourse] and the modern master [university discourse], as Lacan (1992) had pointed out. It is in the passage between these last two that we see a first mutation of knowledge, when the discourse of the modern university comes to fix the features of knowledge as the measure of all things.

In fact, in capitalist discourse there are no ruptures that allow us to understand a liquidation of Modernity, but, on the contrary, its hyper-realization, although with many adaptations, of the tripod that characterized it: *scientific rationality, belief in progress resulting from it and happiness*, taken as the supreme good to be achieved as a corollary of the others (Nobre, 2014). For it is under the shadow of this tripod, already quite altered in its morphology, that capitalism comes to strip itself, taking advantage of its exacerbation, although, according to Lacan (2011b, p. 37), the Enlightenment had “the objective of enunciating a knowledge that did not pay homage to any power”.

Thus, it is possible to perceive how, in the thread of history, there is a structural repetition of the function of mastery, responding to the subject's demand in his search for an answer through knowledge. In this sense, the particularity of the university discourse of elevating knowledge to the place of semblance consists of an intermediate stage for the advent of the capitalist hypermaster. For it is only from this process that makes scientific knowledge the dominant element of modern societies that the conditions for the developments that would occur in the field of knowledge throughout the 20th century, are triggered. It is worth recalling that, throughout the modern period, the university became the institution that began to congregate and legitimize knowledge (Milner, 2012; Teixeira, 2016), having contributed to stripping traditional knowledge of any trace of value. This certainly produced effects on the classical places of mastery, to the extent that the power linked to the traditional master, which came from his relationship with the Other, began to be questioned based on a new scale of values.

But the capitalist discourse cannot be taken as an institution, which would certainly greatly reduce the understanding of its spectrum. What it calls into question is even greater: it is an economic system that, over the course of history, has become hegemonic, based on the technological development of the means of production itself. Thus, it is in the wake of the increase in scientific knowledge, represented by university discourse, that the foundations of technological improvement valid for all fields are found. This process was encouraged not only by governments, but also by an industrial context always eager for innovations that would allow its improvement on all fronts and market expansion. This incentive was what allowed globalization to truly impose itself on the political and economic horizon of richer nations, for which technological development served as a catalyst. It is the dissemination of this shared framework throughout the world that allows us to recognize the experience of a cultural pattern that has the digitalization of human life as its anchor point and conveys the capitalist way of life in an indisputable way.

The subject and knowledge in the lineage of masteries

In the theory of discourses developed by Lacan, it is possible to understand how, based on the discourse of the master, two lines are drawn: a first “subjectivist” one, which develops in a ¼ turn clockwise, having as a sequence hysterical and

² In reference to the concept of *hypermodernity*, by Gilles Lipovestsky (2004), in which the prefix *hyper* denotes that what we are witnessing in contemporary times refers to an exacerbation of the values created in the modern period.

analytical; and another that presents the university discourse, which Lacan designates as “modern master” (Lacan, 1992). It is outside this logic of turns but based on a twist in the first term of the ancient master, that we find the capitalist discourse and which, like the other two, also brings S_1 into the field of the subject. It is this fact and also its historical origin in the development of science that the university discourse represents that allows us, at the expense of the change in the logic of its formation, to understand this second line as characteristic of masteries.

It should be noted that, in the first lineage, discourses are named in a personalistic way, and it is the subject who occupies the prominent positions, whether as truth, as agent or as Other, but, even in the latter case, considered as subject, a particularity of the bond inaugurated by the analyst. In fact, the very notion of subject barred by language, which manages the hysteric’s discourse, is itself the direct result of this inaugural discursivity of the language that the master represents. For this reason, both are immediately linked in their origin. This is also why discourses must be considered for their simultaneous functioning, since there is no possibility of acting strictly in only one of these registers.

It is worth highlighting that the discourse of the analyst, whose emergence, according to Lacan (1998), occurs due to the emergence of modern science itself – due to its rejection of the truth of the unconscious – brings, from the outset, two particularities. Firstly, as noted, it is the only one that considers the Other as a subject and, therefore, calls on the Other to construct, himself, a narrative, a knowledge about himself. In its originality, this bond can only operate because the analyst accepts to occupy the place of the void, making a semblance of the object and protecting himself from all prior knowledge so that the Other can present himself as a subject. Secondly, it was the advent of this discourse that allowed the others to be highlighted and recognized by their different arrangements. As Lacan (2005, p. 60) says in another work, it was “the arrival of the analyst to his own function [that] allowed a lateral illumination of what the other functions are”. It was, according to him, what led him to show the unusual articulations, which change from the rotation of four small elements and which “end up doing very interesting things” (Lacan, 2005, p. 60). Thus, in this confluence, psychoanalysis has a special function, insofar as it is from its emergence as a *sui generis bond* that the different forms of social bonding could be glimpsed or discerned. Furthermore, all this change is largely linked to the decline of ideal instances.

Before proceeding to explore the effects of this “final point” that is this fifth discourse, it is worth noting that, due to its bizarre nature, it is presented not without some reservation by Lacan, since it extrapolates the logic already defined for its matrices. However, this did not prevent his commentators from proposing other versions of Mathema based on the originals, as well as new readings of those already existing. Lacan, in fact, treated the use of Mathema in a playful way and did not fail to encourage his readers to proceed in this way, with the aim of extracting new modalizations and interpretations.

In his texts, Miller (2004) himself proposed a reading – which he himself characterizes as “a fantasy” – of the analyst’s Mathema from a capitalist perspective, following Lacan’s (2003) suggestion in *Radiophony*, which considers the effects of the object’s contemporary zenith. Miller (2004) even goes so far as to question whether the object would be the compass of current civilization, inviting us to overcome inhibitions, so that the discourse of hypermodern civilization would no longer be the opposite of psychoanalysis, but would coincide with it as a discourse.

There is no doubt that this is a path of exploration, and the role of psychoanalysis in culture over the past century cannot be ignored. Miller summarizes this aspect very well when he draws attention to the role of Freud’s legacy in recognizing the logic of enjoyment as inherent to the functioning of civilization, indicating that it was Lacan who had to deal with the “consequences of this sensational success” (Miller, 2004) of psychoanalysis. Although he dealt more directly with the effects of this success, Lacan did not fail to point out the extent of its failure, because, although “it works,” it is not without flaws, since the impossible real is there making itself visible and puncturing the symbolic structures. There are several passages in which this entire game can easily be recognized to demonstrate this reasoning, and Miller (2004) does not shy away from drawing its consequences in several directions.

Other authors also could not resist the temptation and even considered new discursive sequences, either fleetingly or through different formulations of the Mathema. In the first case, Marco Antônio Jorge (2002) alludes to a passage from Lacan (2003) in *Television*, where he comments on the structural proximity between the discourse of the hysteric and that of science, which would become a sixth non-formalized discourse. However, the reference to a “discourse of science” is a constant in Lacan’s teaching and does not seem to have been used in a sense other than that which we can understand from the university discourse, which therefore already had its structure, giving it the form of academic bureaucracy. As for new Mathema, Aurélio de Souza (2003, p. 160) proposed the “discourse of the a-victim”, created to account for contemporary symptomatic manifestations because of growing symbolic precariousness.

Following a path equivalent to that of Miller’s “fantasy” (2004), Néstor Braunstein (2010, p. 158) formulates a “market discourse” that, although it has the same mathematical structure as the analyst, brings an at sign [@] in place of the object a as semblance. In this case, both the analyst and the market, acting under different perspectives of this desubjectified semblance, “hystericize” the Other as subject [\$], favoring the unfolding of fantasy from desire, so as to allow it to produce its master signifiers. However, if the analyst allows the subject to shed the signifiers that bind him to symbolic bonds, in the market discourse, the “servomechanisms”, as Braunstein (2010, p. 149) refers to Lacan’s (1992) *latusas, act as knowledge* [S_2] in place of truth, favoring collective identifications, a common phenomenon in the environments of social networks

on the internet, which does not imply a subjective change as a response. For Braunstein (2010), if the servomechanism assimilates demand and desire in the *semblance of a*, the analyst, on the contrary, “(...) sustains the constant dissociation between both and refuses to confuse the two planes, making demand a question and a questioning of the desire that subtends it” (Braunstein, 2010, p. 161). In this case, we would not have a sixth discourse, but merely a rereading of the analyst’s Mathema, as Miller (2004) did.

There is no doubt that this reading presents good relevance in view of the problems posed to the subject by the advent of digital technologies. This is a point of view that should be explored in parallel with Lacan’s formulation (1978) in Milan, especially considering the perspective of the object zenith that he had already put forward (Lacan, 2003). However, even though this last discourse was written only once, in this case the trajectory that considers the other formations is somewhat faster. Furthermore, less credit is given to the twist between the master and the capitalist, as well as to the very suppression of impossibility, a central point in this Mathema. Therefore, it seems reasonable to maintain for the analytical discourse the interpretation that values its unique positioning that takes the Other as a de facto subject, by making the semblance of emptiness. For, even though it operates through the assumption of knowledge, it does not do so using a fallacious path, as occurs in capitalist discourse.

It is worth mentioning the even bolder proposal by Levi Bryant (2008) who, inspired by Slavoj Žižek even proposes 19 other possible formulations for the Mathema, going well beyond the five left by Lacan. Bryant (2008) points out how the total set of 24 possible Mathema could be divided into six groups of four, each of them making up a “discursive universe”. In this case, the first of them, composed of Lacan’s four original matrices, would be the *universe of Mastery*, initiated by the discourse of the Master, with all subsequent ones. The second, the *universe of Capitalism*, initiated by this discourse, would give rise to three others, maintaining the same order of signifiers and making a quarter of a clockwise turn. In this case, as the author names it, we would have the discourse of Bio-Power, that of Critical Theory and that of Immaterial Production (Bryant, 2008). Thus, although he does not explore all the consequences of the others, Bryant even goes so far as to write the other 16 formulations, divided into four other systems, although without naming them.

For Vinício Darriba and Maurício D’Escragnolle (2017), based on the proposition of capitalist discourse, Lacanian analysis gains “a high degree of criticism”, going beyond the historical dimension that, although it does not exhaust the issue, cannot be disregarded. According to the authors, in addition to denouncing the union of capital with science, Lacan points out that capitalism reproduces itself and, to the extent that it resists criticism, it feeds on everything that opposes it. In this sense, they emphasize that more important than situating the historical beginning of this discourse from a “turn of nothing” (Lacan, 2011c, p. 61) that caused this transmutation of masters to operate and that makes us “even more deceived” (Lacan, 2011c, p. 61), Lacan highlights the absence of an end, which is due to the taking of the surplus-de-jour as its support (Darriba & D’Escragnolle, 2017). For Lacan, in Marx himself one can already visualize a deep relationship between this and the discourse of the master: “What I want to achieve is to make you grasp something as essential as what is, let’s say, the support of the *surplus-de-jour*” (Lacan, 2009, p. 47).

The degradation of knowledge before the new master: *digital discourse*

As we have seen, in recent years, several authors have proposed adding new mathemes to Lacan’s theory of discourses. In general, such efforts have been based on logical exercises, involving permutations and other operations of this nature. The proposal presented here differs from these attempts in its primary motivation. This is not a mere logical experiment, but, on the contrary, it is, first and foremost, the observation of the emergence, quite recently, of a new form of social bond, permeated from end to end by another logic. It is, therefore, an attempt to formalize this new social bond based on the theory of discourses and in line with Lacan’s inaugural gesture: new social bonds are also new discourses, which alter the arrangement of the elements and require the psychoanalyst to make an additional effort in order to formalize the real at stake. Thus, digital discourse – the sixth discourse – does not present itself as the fruit of a combinatorial elucubration or mental experiment, but as the logical formalization of the real at play in the contemporary social bond.

It is from the perspective of the liberation of enjoyment that Miller attributes to Freud and that required Lacan to juggle, that the relationship between knowledge and the object will be addressed from this point on. However, we anticipate that, if the object reaches the social apex – or the “*s o ciel*”, as Miller (2004) rightly says, playing with the French term for “heaven” [*ciel*] –, it does not do so in a crude way, that is, at the expense of the subject. On the contrary, capitalist discourse relies even more on the subject who is barred by language, but a language that conveys enjoyment. For it is from this bar that the object plus-de-enjoyment is the cause and result, so that, once this operation is done, it is good that it remains in the place of remainder. Regarding this aspect, we must think about the disposable nature of everything that capitalism produces today, with all the consequences that we have already experienced. Lacan (2008) is even categorical in disdaining the usefulness of capitalism’s productions, when he states that, although capitalism itself serves “some purpose” – even if only to introduce “so-called liberal power” – the same cannot be said of its productions: “It is the things it does that are useless” (Lacan, 2008, p. 232). It is, then, from the position of remainder that the object is still approached within the scope

of capitalist discourse, which would lead us to question how knowledge is implicated in its production. As we will see, a new “turn” will be necessary for us to visualize the zenith of the object, announced by Lacan, and which, in our view, will imply an even more radical transformation in the status of knowledge.

If university discourse favored capitalism’s takeover of knowledge, to make it mercantile (Teixeira, 2016), it was due to its fixation as knowledge capable of circulation and, therefore, transmissible as content and through different supports. Thus, with the advent of technosciences, a new modality of knowledge, more ephemeral, light and detached from commitments to any ethical notions, could be identified in terms of information. The emergence of ICTs is, therefore, the most accomplished product of this capitalization of knowledge that, subjected to the process of digitalization, makes virtual not only the notion of commodity, but also definitively converts what was previously knowledge into an object, which becomes more easily circulatable, exchangeable through digital flows.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the issue of changes in the status of knowledge can be linked to the current predominance of enjoyment in our society. To this end, one must consider the origin of the conjunction of both – knowledge and enjoyment – in the discursive topology, placing it on the threshold between the logic of desire and the field of enjoyment. In this regard, Danziato (2015) is categorical in pointing out the graph of desire as being the apex of the symbolic period and being at the genesis of Mathema, this being a first formalization that presents the correlation between the movement of signifiers and the ontological drama of the subject in its relationship with the Other. In this sense, Danziato justifies Lacan’s return to the Other in *Seminar 16*, where its conception as a treasure of signifiers will be reviewed and defined by its missing structure. Furthermore, the graph already brings forward the proximity between language and enjoyment, as well as its relationship with truth, three central elements in discursive logic. In the graph “(...) these fundamental relations move not only in the field of signification, but (are) subject to a logic that implies demand and enjoyment of the Other, as well as the lack of a signifier in the field of the Other (A)” (Danziato, 2015, p. 213).

Following the graph, the formalization of discourses would be the way found by Lacan to formalize this failure of knowledge in the field of the Other and the consequent impossibility of it uniting with the truth. Not finding this truth, a signifier is called upon to produce it as its fiction in relation to the desire of the Other. Hence, the subject resorts to fantasy as a resource against this void of knowledge of the Other about itself. In this way, the writing of discourses represents the overcoming of the Freudian Oedipal logic, which prevailed in the symbolic ordering of enjoyment and which required, after the decolonization of the bond inhabited by the symbolic father, a new formalization that could give another treatment to this real. In this case, such treatment could only be done by “considering the impossibility of significance and meaning, revealed in the (Lacanian) saying ‘there is no sexual relation’” (Danziato, 2015, p. 219).

Under these new parameters, with the subversion that enjoyment brings to the clinical dimension, in the form of a disjunction between knowledge and truth, knowledge begins to function as truth, no longer restricted to the enunciative form, but rather demonstrative of this impossibility of which enjoyment comes to be the bearer, as an element of the real. From this perspective, knowledge gains a new conception and should no longer be “(...) understood as a significant articulation, but as a way of directing drive satisfaction (...), therefore directly linked to repetition and understood as a device for writing enjoyment” (Danziato, 2015, p. 221). In this case, knowledge begins to deal with what remains of the significant articulation and which becomes the object *a*, which is why Lacan defines it as a “means of enjoyment” (Danziato, 2015, p. 221).

It is precisely with this motto that the theory of discourses and, especially, the proposition of the capitalist discourse proves to be relevant to the discussion at hand. In this discourse, the confluence between knowledge, truth and enjoyment brings as a novelty the fact that, under a new dynamic and with a positioning of signifiers different from that initially proposed, enjoyment reaches a level in which truth is even more reduced, and knowledge undergoes significant changes in its status, due to an even more radical unfolding. In a passage from “*I Am Talking to the Walls*” (Lacan, 2011a), Lacan makes clear the importance maintained by knowledge which, through the play of signifiers, is what allows us to suppose the subject in the discursive network, supposed in relation to that which is the Other, to which we give body: “You do not give it meaning, nor do you even have enough for yourselves. But you give it a body, to this signifier that represents you, the master signifier” (Lacan, 2011a, p. 96). In this way, we see how the signifier, the primary element of knowledge, remains active when it takes shape, via the subject, in the discursive game. In the dynamics established in digital culture, new readings can be extracted from the elements that make up the social bond based on the changes in the value that each element assumes in the Mathema.

It is at the heart of digital culture that the idea of a change in the status of knowledge, previously put forward by Lyotard (2008), takes shape. With the entry into action of Google’s digital algorithm, starting in 2009, a new mode of governance began to compose the procedures for the circulation of information on the internet. An *algorithm* is a relatively simple formulation that allows, on a purely inductive statistical basis, the construction of models of behavior or patterns in a given system. This device has been the target of much criticism directed at “information capitalism,” which emerged from the emergence and development of information theories and science (Mattelart, 2001). This implementation by Google allowed signage to offer personalized information to its users (Alves, 2019), which represented a radical change in the way data and information are processed by the technological apparatus, with increasing social, political, economic, and subjective effects.

The result of the handling of such data by *big data*, which returns to the user in the form of products, always under the veil of access to information, causes it to be retained in the web of the world wide web. In it, on the one hand, the psychic economy of the user entangled by virtual reality moves, and on the other, the market economy that finds there a vast field to be explored by big capital. (Nobre & Lima, 2019)

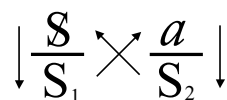
In this way, *big data* represents the subjection of the consumer to the market. Seduced by the uninterrupted and bilateral supply of information, products return to the network user in an increasingly personalized way, which keeps him/her captured in the network, connected by all sorts of affections that he/she experiences there. Information thus becomes a vehicle for maximum extraction of the subject, increasingly touching him/her in the dimension of enjoyment, which seems evident judging by the prominence assumed by the body in our society. It is to the extent that it begins to operate in favor of instinctual satisfaction that knowledge, being linked to the spelling of enjoyment, can implement repetition in its automatism. Algorithms convert the subject into an object of an absolute, omnipresent gaze, which controls him/her and reduces him/her to pure calculation. We live according to a form of unconscious instinctual satisfaction that conditions many of our acts. All our steps, lines, marks and holes are analyzed to extract the singularity of enjoyment. The enjoyment that is present in what is consumed, in what is read, in what is seen, in ideals, values and tastes, is translated into consumption profiles.

If, in the spectrum of capitalist discourse, the subject had already become more autonomous, empowered with an individualizing position that was highly cultivated in the modern period (Sibilia, 2008), at the present time this phenomenon is exacerbated in response to the invitation to enjoy information, the ultimate object of social networks, the stage for all subjective exhibition and triumphalism. Encouraged to *perform* within a flexible framework of identifications that can be changed according to the incessant and ever-available innovations, the subject is faced with the multiple truths formulated by the digital hypermaster of the *big data* and is invited to enjoy the fact that he can compose his own truth. This self-centered truth, well adapted to his demands, dispenses with all references, except those that the subject is urged to choose in the immediacy of the responses offered by the platforms he visits. To this extent, the subject's bonds are further compromised, since the Other, already revealed in its inconsistency, suffers from a decrease in its effects as a symbolic reference.

Judging by the place that information has taken in the modern world, it seems inevitable that we will observe the convergence of this form of knowledge, highly capitalizable in its virtualized format through digital means, in the direct form of the object, assuming all its features: whether as a product, as work, in short, otherwise disposable like any packaging for the most common products. However, if in the capitalist discourse there was a twist in the first term of the master's discourse, in addition to the changes that imply in the dynamics of the Mathema, it seems plausible to think of a *digital discourse* in which this twist also occurs in the second term, which would become its distinguishing point. From this perspective, we could propose a Mathema with the configuration shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Digital Discourse



In this way, we would be witnessing a never-before-seen change in the status of knowledge, which, finding itself in decline due to its function of significant linkage, guaranteeing the subject's connection to the Other, finds itself altered above all by the appeal of the jouissance aspect, rising to the zenith while at the same time objectifying itself. From this perspective, it seems legitimate to postulate that we are facing a new form of social bond, a new discourse, in which information, the residue of knowledge, upon becoming one of the most ephemeral objects, takes its place, flooding the symbolic field, of the word, with the excesses inherent to the real of jouissance.

What we see is, therefore, a disjunction between knowledge and information, because even though the latter comes from the field of knowledge, its experience seems to be lost from the place, until then devoted to the symbolic dimension, in clear decline in the face of the sea of images available in digital culture. In this way, information no longer has anything to do with knowledge [S₂], but rather with it. It is a residue of knowledge, but its inherent aspect in the field of enjoyment has been explored above all. Note that this new digital discourse produces the same closed-circuit effect resulting from the disappearance of the mark of the impossibility of discourses at the level of enunciation.

Based on this new arrangement, it is worth questioning the value that each signifier assumes in the configuration of the new Mathema:

- [S] the subject as consumer: in this Mathema the neurotic subject as we know him, always dissatisfied and clinging

to his symptom, is also at the level of agent and his access to the Other remains impeded by the deviation of the vector that directs the subject towards his own truth. Hyper-invested in himself and relegated to a constructed “truth”, whose contours are only defined by the effects of S_1 at that position, the subject finds himself stimulated by the seductively hidden resources of the digital algorithms implemented by the master of *big data*. *His relationship with reality is permeated by the digital bubbles in which he is inserted together with his peers; the libidinally invested objects that appear on his screen are in fact the result of algorithmic calculations based on pieces of information that he himself provides.*

- [S_1] *big data*: situated as truth, here the master signifier makes use of the seductive appeal of the market that is now clothed in the figure of *big data*, with the consumption of objectified information being the new watchword returned from this instance, with its great force of attraction over the subject. Furthermore, the master, in this case, places himself as an intermediary on the path of the subject to the Other, even more weakened in its symbolic efficacy, which is left to “serve” the subject no longer as knowledge, but as information, object *a*, a direct means of enjoyment. In this case, the imaginary aspect is the most widely explored path from the perspective of information. The specularity of the network is evident in the very abundance of its imagetic content, functioning as a “swarm” [*esse un*] of S_1 to use here the homophony of the French language already explored by Lacan (1985). Digital algorithms know more about the subject’s desire than he himself does and often anticipate for him the signifiers that govern the shifts inherent to desire that he is unaware of. The race of information engineers is precisely the race of those who can best anticipate the desire of the subject of consumption.
- [*the*] information: in the place where knowledge [S_2] would come from, in the logic that prevailed until the capitalist era, the object appears, to which the truth of S_1 refers directly. Information itself is the object par excellence in the digital age. In a more common sense, information is an object of purchase and sale. More than that, information is not only an object of desire, but also that which it lacks, assuming the form of the impossible and the temporality of the ephemeral: we are always running after information, always late, always thirsty for the latest news. Here the object is not a mere residual product, a worthless remainder. Taking the place of the other, previously devoted to knowledge, it now appears in the form of information, a contemporary fluid that, exploring to the maximum the supplementary aspect of surplus enjoyment, aims to meet the subject’s constant demand for consumption, fed back by the digital algorithm at the service of *big data*. It is worth remembering that such objects can always be seen from the perspective of their drive partiality, as already pointed out by Lacan (1988).
- [S_2] knowledge: unlike knowledge in the master’s discourse, here knowledge gives way to the preponderant language of information which, in its current essence, is composed of the attributes of digital data. Transmuted and reduced in its status, knowledge is what remains of the subject in this process, being reabsorbed by the algorithmic system and which, like unpaid work, makes the subject appear as a new slave.

Thus, it is with apparent frugality that digital information, upon entering the niche of the object, takes the place of knowledge in the interaction of signifiers. However, this phenomenon is the result of decades of operation of a discourse that was gestated within the most advanced technological development, in the sense of coupling the machine with the elements most characteristic of the human, those related to affection, touching on the point where they intertwine with language. It is as a field of both language and enjoyment that knowledge reveals itself to be increasingly innocuous in the face of the efficiency of this new drift that, starting from the pluralized hypermaster, has its status altered at the level of the object. In this context, the body of knowledge, already quite deviated from the unconscious truth, appears itself as a remnant of this apparatus put into operation by the new master, in which the subject is taken by assault through the path of affection, in the field of enjoyment. Thus, it becomes more easily accessible through *gadgets* that convey digital language and which themselves create the effect of the object of more enjoyment.

Final considerations

As we can understand, the transition from capitalist (hypermodern) discourse to digital discourse is not a simple permutation, but a new social event, in which the digital corresponds to a technology with radical effects on the being of enjoyment and, therefore, on the social bond. For such discourse is the emergence of a historical moment that has to do with a new cultural pattern and with the modalities that this pattern has come to imply in the bond, an excessively identifying bond and, therefore, with segregatory tendencies, highly driven by the intensity of the affective path. In this reading, it is in the realm of the digital that we see the object rise to the zenith through the inversion that occurred in the field of the Other, in terms of a new language. Faced with this objectal zenith of information, unconscious knowledge, now relegated to the place of remainder, seems to assume the function of direct source of the new master, *big data*. Thus, it becomes something like a new *commodity*, whose residues will always be captured and fed back into the simplicity of the algorithmic device. From what we produce from this remainder, how to know, while we exercise our mode of enjoyment

by strolling through the *sites* and digital platforms, a large part is reincorporated into the *looping* of the system that makes up the engine of digital culture.

Although our own trajectory, after a few hours in front of the screen, escapes us, this remainder provides the material for the set S1, strategically positioned for the subject's addresses, to constantly renew itself, returning to the subject in the form of paths, options, choices that he himself does not retain, no longer knows, although they bring a personalized appearance, as if foreseeing, guessing and, finally, prescribing what he wants. In this hypertrophy of the private, the *a*, as information, is disseminated in the *gadgets*, in the *latusas* envisioned by Lacan as causing desire and that, objectifying language itself, offer knowledge that is increasingly standardized, statutory and, above all, controlled (Deleuze, 1992).

From this perspective, in addition to conceiving information as a new derivative of knowledge, it is necessary to consider that in its digital format, although it is related to knowledge, it has a radically different status due to the change that we see taking place here. For, in its constitutional division, the subject is at the same time the consumer who enjoys updating himself and his various *profiles*, as well as who supplies the new master, merchant of S₁, the highest point in the hierarchy of informational capital, granting his knowledge, his own information. After all, S₁, the signifying master, is the trait that introduces the division in the subject, that inserts him into language at the same time that it allows him to glimpse the extraction of enjoyment (Lacan 1992). In this case, it acts so that he, possessed of his being of enjoyment, consumes more, enjoys more, buying more information and objects, in the vain attempt to saturate or suture this division, while devoting his knowledge to the new master.

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